

Consideration of Exceptional Circumstances for the Swordfish MP 2026

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Request for Feedback

The paper is to request **review and feedback**, by the Working Party on Billfish, regarding the preliminary 2026 review of exceptional circumstances for the IOTC Management Procedure for Swordfish. The key areas of focus and feedback being requested are summarised in the Abstract. In short, the Working Party on Billfish is requested to consider any new information relating to population dynamics, stock status, data (catch, effort, CPUE) or fisheries (methods, operations) that may present evidence for potential exceptional circumstances. Feedback from the WPB will then be incorporated into a revised version of this paper for further consideration by the Working Party on Methods in October 2026.

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Abstract

The IOTC adopted a revised swordfish management procedure (MP) in 2025 (IOTC 2025a), which was used to recommend the Total Allowable Catch (TAC) for the Indian Ocean stock: 30,527 t per year for 2026 to 2028.

As part of the MP schedule, the Commission has adopted an annual review of evidence for exceptional circumstances that checks for conditions that could make the implementation of the TAC advice risky to the stock or fishery.

The Exceptional Circumstances Guidelines (Appendix 6A in IOTC (2021)) specify a three-stage process: (i) examining evidence for exceptional circumstances, (ii) determining severity and impact, and (iii) recommending any management or research action that should be taken. A wide range of information is reviewed to examine if there is evidence for exceptional circumstances, e.g., changes in the knowledge of stock or fishery uncertainties against which the MP was tested. The Exceptional Circumstances Guidelines provide a scientific process for developing appropriate management responses to exceptional circumstances and, hence, provide transparency in TAC decision-making by the Commission.

This paper summarises the outcomes from a review of a wide range of information to determine whether there is evidence of exceptional circumstances. It is important to note that this review paper may not yet take account of all new information presented to the WPB24 (9-12 September 2026). However, any new and relevant information can be included in a revised paper for consideration by the Working Party on Methods (October 2026). The key conclusions, and **further considerations required by WPB24**, from the review are:

- **TAC implementing measure** – At its meeting in May 2026, the IOTC Commission adopted Resolution 26/02 to implement (and allocate) the TAC recommended by the MP (IOTC, 2026a) for the years 2027 and 2028. Noting that only major catching CPCs have explicit catch limits under the Resolution, it will be important the Commission ensures total catches do not exceed the recommended level.
- **Stock status, population dynamics or biology**
 - A new swordfish stock assessment will be presented to WPB24 in 2026 and the **WPB should review if:**
 - **a) any biological or fishery data inputs to the assessment lie outside the bounds of those used in the operating models (OMs), and/or;**
 - **b) if key population outputs from the assessment lie outside the bounds of those predicted by the OMs.**
 - The WPB23 (2025) considered that new information on swordfish stock structure presented to its 23rd meeting (Sept 2023) might provide evidence of an exceptional circumstance. WPM16 (2025) subsequently reviewed this issue and *“NOTED that currently there is not sufficient certainty around the implications of the new research on stock structure to conclude that there is an exceptional circumstance in relation to the swordfish MP TAC advice. The WPM AGREED that additional sampling and analyses should be prioritised by the SC and Commission to help reduce uncertainty around stock structure”* (IOTC, 2025e).
- **Fishery or fishing operations** - Two issues were discussed at the WPB23 and WPM16 meetings in 2025 that are relevant to the consideration of potential exceptional circumstances.

- Firstly, a new longline fishing gear (meka-rings) for targeting swordfish has emerged in the Atlantic and Pacific Oceans. Its use in the Indian Ocean, and its potential impact on longline catchability, is as yet uncertain. **WPB24 should consider any new information presented on this issue.**
- Secondly, shifts have been identified in the relative proportion of swordfish catch by fishery type over time (noted by WPB22 and WPB23), but these have been incorporated into the MSE OMs, and the subsequent MP performance tested and demonstrated to be acceptable. Fishery catch levels and proportions from the 2 most recent years of data are not substantially different to the most recent levels considered by the OMs, albeit total catch levels continue to show a declining trend in recent years. **WPB24 should review if there have been further shifts in relative proportions of swordfish catch by fishery.**
- **Catch data inputs** – In 2025 there had been no significant recent changes in the quality and representativeness of swordfish catch data to be utilised by the MP. **WPB24 should consider if this remains the case in 2026.**
- **CPUE data inputs** –
 - Standardised catch per unit effort (StdCPUE) time series estimates from 2023 (for period to 2022) and 2024 (for period to 2023) are very similar. Prediction skill of the north west Indian Ocean (NWIO) Japanese longline CPUE remains acceptable.
 - However, the issue of declining Japanese effort in the NWIO area from which the CPUE is derived should firstly, **continue to be monitored by WPB24 in 2026 (including via review of any new CPUE papers for the Japanese longline fleet)** and secondly, be given more explicit consideration, for example, as part of the review of the MP planned for 2031, if not before.
 - Revised stdCPUE time series are due to be estimated for the revised IOTC Swordfish stock assessment to be reviewed by WPB24 in 2026. **The WPB24 should review the standardised Japanese LL CPUE for the northwest model region and identify if there are significant changes (to the previous series), or further reductions in the amount of effort data underpinning that index, that warrant further considerations for potential exceptional circumstances.**

1. Introduction

The IOTC first adopted the swordfish management procedure (MP) in 2024 via Resolution 24/08 (IOTC, 2024a) and then adopted a slightly revised MP in 2025 (IOTC, 2025a) via Resolution 25/07¹. The MP is run every 3 years to recommend an annual Total Allowable Catch (TAC) for the subsequent 3-year period. As part of the MP schedule, the Commission has adopted an annual review of evidence for exceptional circumstances, to check for conditions that could make implementing the MP TAC advice risky. Exceptional circumstances are conditions or data that fall outside the range of uncertainties that the MP was tested against, i.e., the reference set of operating models used for Management Strategy Evaluation (MSE), and the robustness tests. The Exceptional Circumstances Guidelines (IOTC–2021–SC24 Appendix 6A) provide a scientific process for examining evidence for exceptional circumstances, evaluating potential impacts, and developing appropriate management responses if necessary. This process of examining evidence for exceptional circumstances provides a safety-net around the MP TAC advice and transparency in TAC decision making by the Commission.

The exceptional circumstances review process has three stages:

- 1) determine whether any exceptional circumstances exist,
- 2) determine the severity and impact of the exceptional circumstances on achieving the objectives of the MP, and
- 3) if necessary, identify the research and/or management actions that could be taken by the IOTC.

The swordfish MP was run for the first time in 2024, resulting in advice from the SC to the Commission on implementing an annual TAC of 30527t for the years 2026 to 2028 (IOTC, 2024f). The Commission has subsequently adopted Resolution 26/02 to implement and allocate the TAC for 2027 and 2028 (IOTC 2026a).

This report provides advice on evidence of exceptional circumstances in 2025, using the same report template and structure as developed by Preece and Williams (2022) for bigeye tuna.

2. Examining evidence for the existence of exceptional circumstances in 2024

The information that should be checked for evidence of exceptional circumstances is specified in the Guidelines (IOTC–2021–SC24 Appendix 6A).

The MP is specified in Resolution 25/07 (IOTC, 2025a).

The operating models (OMs) used to MSE test the adopted MP included a range of uncertainties and conditions (Brunel and Mosqueira 2024a, 2024b) (**Table 1**), and the robustness tests (that test implementation errors, 2-year management lag and recruitment failure) are specified in Brunel and Mosqueira (2024c).

¹ The revised MP had been retuned to correct for errors (during the MSE tuning process) in both the CPUE values applied for 2020-2022, and the lag applied for the period between the final year CPUE and the first year of TAC implementation.

Table 1 – Structural uncertainty grid used to develop the swordfish operating model

Selectivity	Double normal		
Steepness	0.6	0.75	0.9
Growth + Maturity	Slow growth, late maturity (Wang et al., 2010)	Fast growth, early maturity (Farley et al., 2016, otoliths)	
Natural Mortality	Low = 0.2	High = 0.3	Sex-specific Lorenzen M (Farley et al. (2016), otoliths)
Sigma R	0.2	0.4	0.6
ESS	2	20	
CPUE scaling	Biomass		
CPUEs	JPN late + EU.PRT	JPN late	TWN + EU.PRT
Catchability increase	0%	1% / year	

The data input specification of the standardised CPUE is in Matsumoto et al. (2023) and the outputs of the 2024 standardisation are found here ([link](#)). Catch data preparation is specified in IOTC (2024a) and IOTC (2024b).

The following items, specified in the Exceptional Circumstances Guidelines (IOTC–2021–SC24 Appendix 6A), have been examined:

- New knowledge about the stock, population dynamics or biology,
- Changes in fisheries or fishing operations,
- Changes to input data to the MP, or missing data, or
- Inconsistent implementation of the MP advice (e.g., total catch is greater than, or less than, the TAC) or changes to the operation of the MP.

2.1 New knowledge - Stock, population dynamics or biology

2.1.1 Biology and population dynamics

There was no new information on biology or biological parameters for swordfish population dynamics presented at WPB23 in 2025.

Both the 2023 stock assessment and the MP OMs utilised the same inputs to inform population parameters and similar ranges of these parameters where multiple values were explored in the assessment grid or OMs (**Tables 1** and **2**). WPB23 were not presented with any new biological research on swordfish that was relevant to the assessment or OM population dynamics. The SB/SB_{MSY} time-series from the 2023 assessment was shown to be within the range of the operating models and projections and indicated that the population dynamics are reasonably stable (**Figure 1** upper) (Brunel and Mosqueira (2024a)).

The 2024 review of exceptional circumstances (Bromhead et al., 2024), noted that recent papers on swordfish movement (West et al., 2023, Romanov et al., 2023, Neiblas et al., 2023), as reviewed by WPB21 (2023), did not present any evidence to support stock structure assumptions different to those in the assessment and OMs (i.e. single stock). However, research presented to WPB18 in 2020 (Grewe et al., 2020) identified some evidence of potential north-south stock structuring for IOTC swordfish and WPB23 (2025) reviewed recent genetic research (Chevrier et al 2024) that reached similar conclusions (IOTC, 2024e). The WPB23

discussion of this recent research is summarised in its meeting report (IOTC-2025-WPB23-R[E]). The WPB23 considered that the new information on swordfish stock structure might provide evidence of an exceptional circumstance and requested further review of this by WPM. Subsequently, WPM16 (IOTC 2025e) reviewed this issue and noted the following:

58. The WPM NOTED the gaps in the data and spatial extent of sampling, and the need for collection of additional samples from other subregions not yet sampled, including from gillnet fisheries in the north and from fisheries in the Eastern Indian Ocean (e.g., including off West Australia). There may be some samples collected in EIO not yet analysed.

59. The WPM NOTED that additional sampling could be prioritised by the SC as part of the scoping work to develop a new IOTC biological sample collection program.

60. The WPM NOTED that additional simulation analyses could be conducted for design of sample collection that will lead to better understanding of movement and mixing between regions and implications for the assessment, OMs and MP. The simulation analyses could also examine levels at which stock structure would matter.

61. The WPM NOTED that undertaking Close-Kin Mark-Recapture (CKMR, genetic analysis of kin-pairs) could help in reducing uncertainty in stock structure due to the CKMR approach operating on timescales more relevant to informing current structure/mixing assumptions.

In conclusion, the WPM16 “NOTED that currently there is not sufficient certainty around the implications of the new research on stock structure to conclude that there is an exceptional circumstance in relation to the swordfish MP TAC advice. The WPM AGREED that additional sampling and analyses should be prioritised by the SC and Commission to help reduce uncertainty around stock structure”.

However, this current review of EC has not taken account of papers presented to the 2026 meeting of WPB and as such **WPB24 is requested to review the new stock assessment and any new biological information included in the assessment, or presented to the WPB24 separate to the assessment, and consider if there is any evidence for potential exceptional circumstances** (e.g. new information on biological parameter values that fall outside those considered in the OMs).

2.1.2 Stock status

The 2023 stock assessment (Fu, 2023) estimated that the stock is not overfished and not subject to overfishing. The key uncertainties considered in the 48 models in the reference set of models of the 2023 assessment are CPUE, growth, length composition data, recruitment variability and steepness (**Table 2**).

Brunel and Mosqueira (2024a) compared the SB/SB_{MSY} and F/F_{MSY} estimates from the 2023 stock assessment with those from the range of scenarios included in the swordfish operating models (**Figure 1**). The 2023 stock assessment estimates of SB/SB_{MSY} and F/F_{MSY} were shown to be within the 90% probability interval of the estimates from the operating models used to test the performance and tune the MP (**Figure 1**), and therefore Bromhead et al (2024g) considered that there was no evidence for exceptional circumstances with respect to stock status.

However, a new stock assessment for IOTC swordfish will be presented to WPB24 in 2026 and subsequently WPB should consider if there is any new information relating to stock

Table 2 - Final model options for the 2023 assessment consist of a full combination of options below, with a total of 48 models. Reference model options are highlighted (Source – Fu, 2023).

Model options	Description
<i>CPUE</i>	<i>cj</i> – CPUE options from revised model (UJPLL, UPOR, UZAF) <i>ct</i> – CPUE options from the atlCPUE model (UJPLL, UTWLL, UIND)
<i>growth</i>	GoMf – Otolith based growth estimates by Farley et al. 2016. <i>GtMf</i> – Estimates by Wang et al. 2010.
Length composition data	CL20 – A maximum of 20 for the effective sample size - CL05 – A maximum of 5 for the effective sample size
Recruitment variability	R2 – recruitment $\sigma_R=0.2$ - R4 – recruitment $\sigma_R=0.4$.
Steepness	- h70 – Stock-recruitment steepness parameter 0.7 h80 – Stock-recruitment steepness parameter 0.8 - h90 – Stock-recruitment steepness parameter 0.9

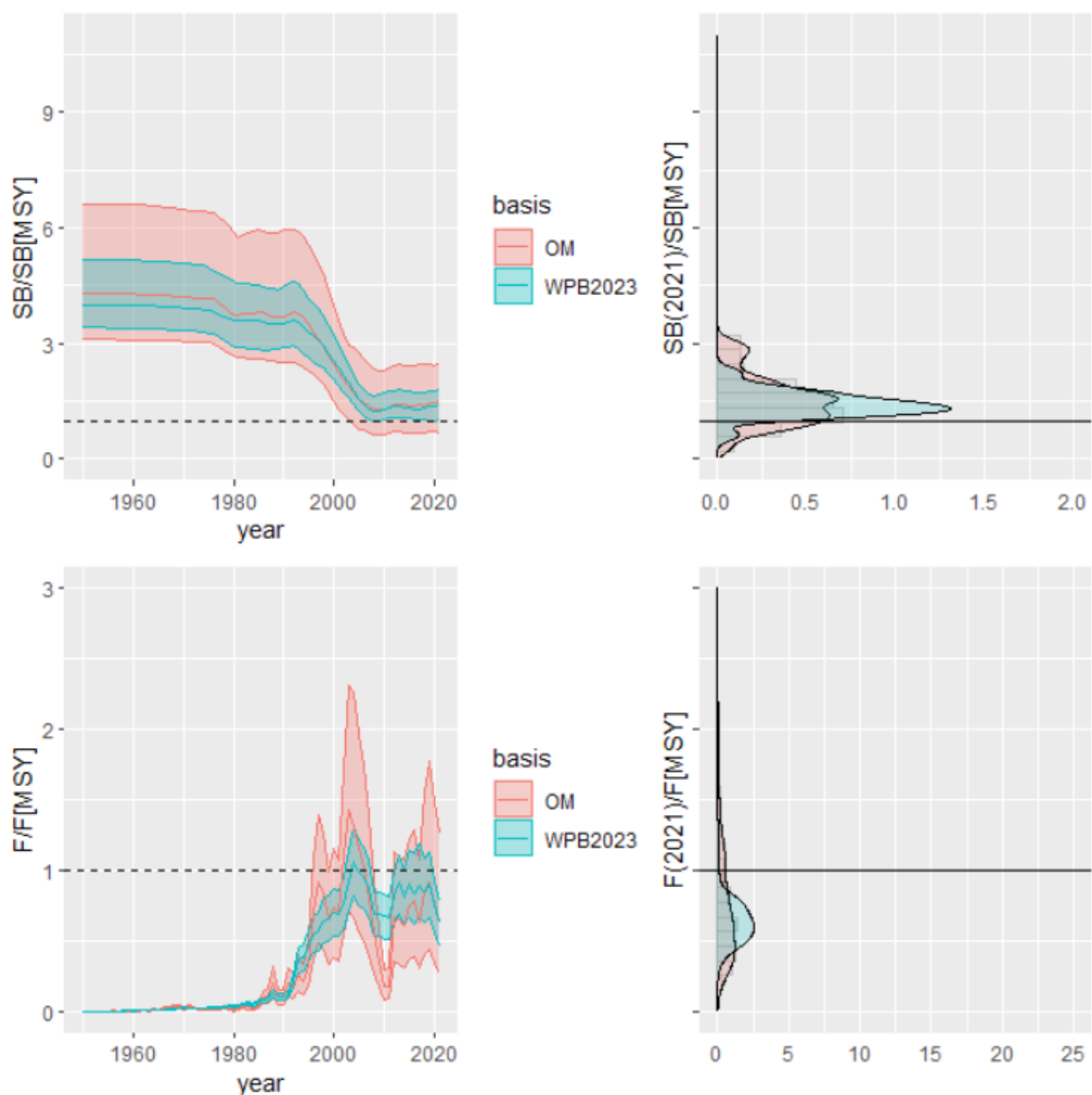


Figure 1 - Historical swordfish stock development (left) and stock status in 2021 (right) in the Operating Model developed for the MSE (red) and in the WPB 2023 swordfish assessment (blue) Brunel and Mosqueira (2024a).

status in the new assessment that constitutes potential exceptional circumstances (e.g. do the estimates of SB/SB_{MSY} and F/F_{MSY} fall within the 90% probability interval of the estimates from the operating models).

2.2 Fishery or fishing operations

With respect to changes in fisheries or fishing operations, the review of information for potential exceptional circumstances identified two key issues for consideration.

Firstly, WPB23 in 2025 noted information provided by participants on the potential emergence of a new longline fishing gear, called meka-ring or loop gear, that is used to target swordfish, and the potential for this to impact on IOTC swordfish catch and CPUE indices in the future if adopted in IOTC longline fisheries. A paper describing the use of this gear ([IOTC-2025-WPEB21\(AS\)-26](#)) was also presented to the Working Party on Ecosystems and Bycatch (September 2025). The WPEB21 noted that this new gear has been increasingly used in longline fisheries in various oceans, with papers to ICCAT describing its use in the Mediterranean (for several years), and more recently in the Atlantic. Currently, the extent of its use in the IOTC area is unknown and as such the WPEB21 “**RECOMMENDED** that the SC takes note and REQUESTED CPC scientists to investigate within their fleets if such gear is in use in the Indian Ocean, and consider, taking into account the ongoing work at ICCAT, starting to include this type of gear in data collection methods in their logbook and/or observer program to collect the corresponding catch and effort data in the future. It is noted from some very preliminary literature that with this new loop gear the catch rates of swordfish are higher, while shark and turtle bycatch is much lower...”. The WPB23 noted that Japan has started collecting information on the use of this gear already and will provide an update to the WPB in future. The WPM16 (in 2025) also noted that the historic and current use of meka-ring in the IOTC is uncertain, and more information needs to be provided by CPCs on use and impacts on swordfish catchability. **WPB24 should consider any new information presented on this issue.**

The second issue discussed at the 2025 WPB23 and WPM meetings relates to the distribution of swordfish catches by fisheries over time. Both WPB22 and WPB23 noted, that a) there has been a shift in the relative levels of Swordfish catch from distant water fisheries to coastal fisheries over time and, b) in association with that, a decline in Japanese longline fishing effort and catch in the north-west Indian Ocean that might have potential implications for whether the Japanese CPUE can index stock abundance in that area (IOTC, 2024e). The overall shift in catch between fisheries is discussed here (below) and the Japanese CPUE implications are discussed further under section 2.3.2 (below).

Regarding the shift in catch from distant water to coastal fisheries (point a above), it is clear from the most recent reviews of IOTC statistical data for Swordfish (IOTC, 2024c; IOTC, 2025b) that this has been occurring since 2004, with significant shift in total amount and relative proportions of catch by fishery type occurring between 2010 and 2020 (**Figure 2, Figure 3**). While shifts in relative catch levels between fisheries can have implications for size selectivity of the fisheries and associated fishing mortality at age, these changes in catch data have been incorporated into MSE operating models, and the MP performance has been tested under these conditions. The most recent 2 years of data are not substantially different to recent catches (IOTC 2024c, IOTC Secretariat, pers com., 2024, **Figure 3**), albeit noting total catch levels continue to show a declining trend in recent years.

In 2025 the WPM16 concluded, on the basis that there were no identified changes in recent fishery operations (but noting further information is to be gathered on the use of meka-rings) and no substantial differences in the recent relative proportions of catch by fishery type to those used in the OMs for the MSE, that there was not currently any identified exceptional circumstances in relation to fisheries and fishing operations.

However, WPB16 is requested to consider if there is any additional information presented to WPB16 to indicate further recent changes to fisheries, catch proportions by fishery and fishing operations that might warrant further attention as potential exceptional circumstances.

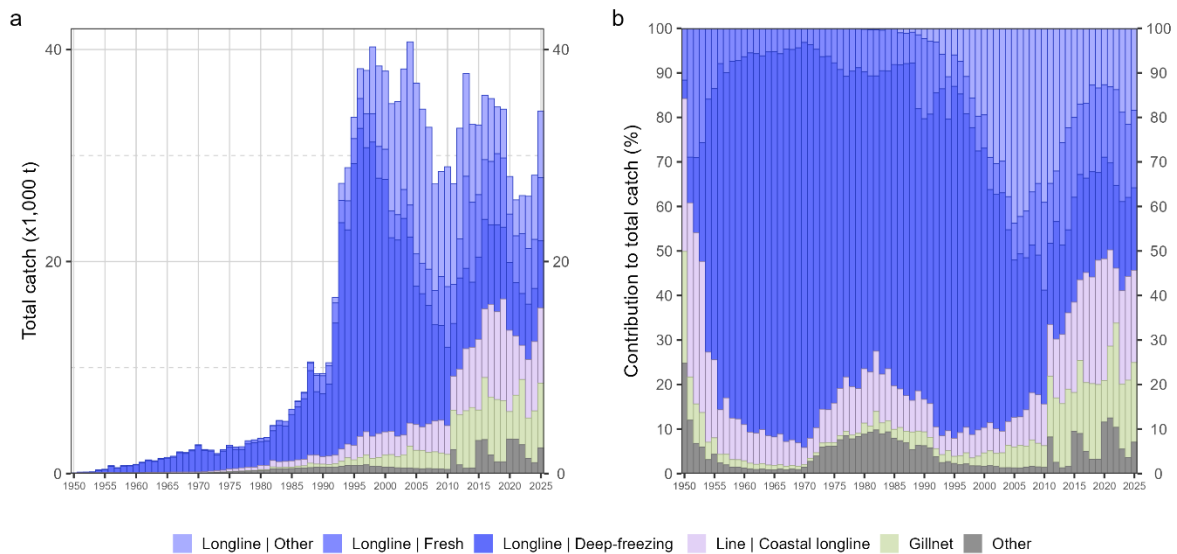


Figure 2 - Annual time series of cumulative retained absolute (a) and relative (b) catches (metric tonnes; t) of swordfish by IOTC fishery type for the period 1950-2022. Data source: best scientific estimates of retained catches. (Source IOTC 2025b).

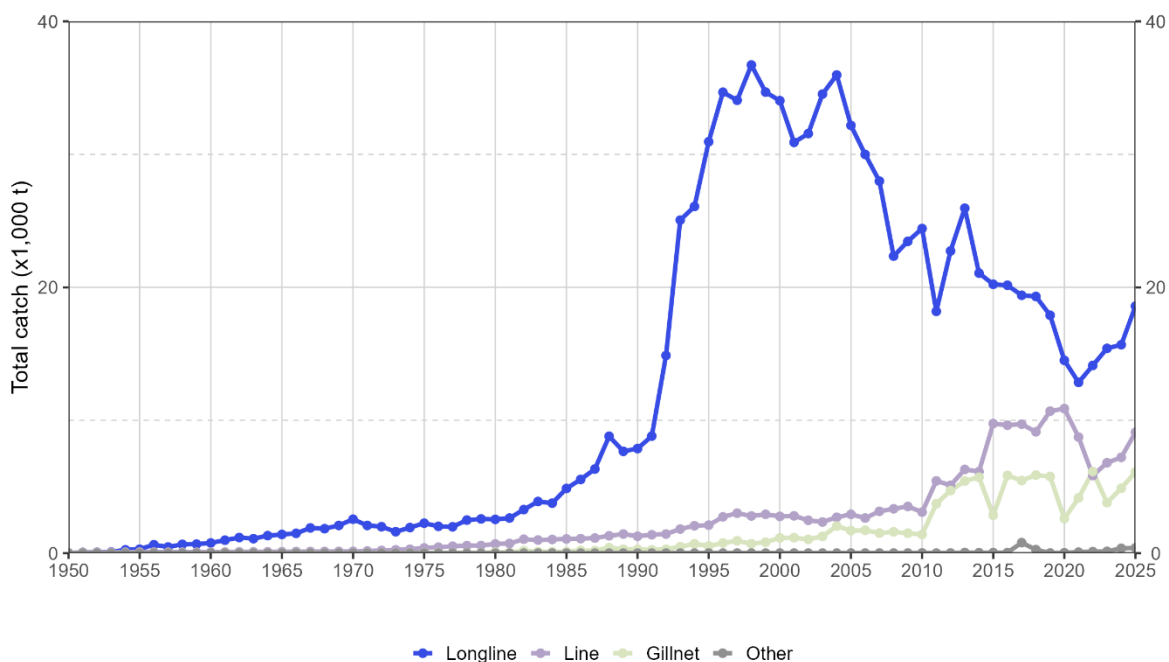


Figure 3 – Annual time series of retained catches (metric tonnes; t) of swordfish by fishery group for the period 1950-2023. (Source IOTC 2025b).

2.3 MP input data and operation of the MP

2.3.1 Catch data

Total IOTC catch estimates, including 2023 catches, were available for running the MP in 2024.

The WPDCS21 (2023), WPB22 (2024) and WPB23 (2025) reviewed recent nominal catches, fishery features, quality and representativeness of catch data relative to previous years and have noted similar quality and representativeness of reported data (IOTC, 2024c, 2025b). The 2024 review of IOTC statistical data for IOTC Swordfish noted that “*The quality of the total retained catches of swordfish is considered to be good and overall the best among the five billfish species under IOTC mandate*” (IOTC 2024c) and this level of quality was maintained in the most recent year estimated (**Figure 4**) (IOTC, 2025b).

On the basis of this, there is no evidence of exceptional circumstances pertaining to the catch data.

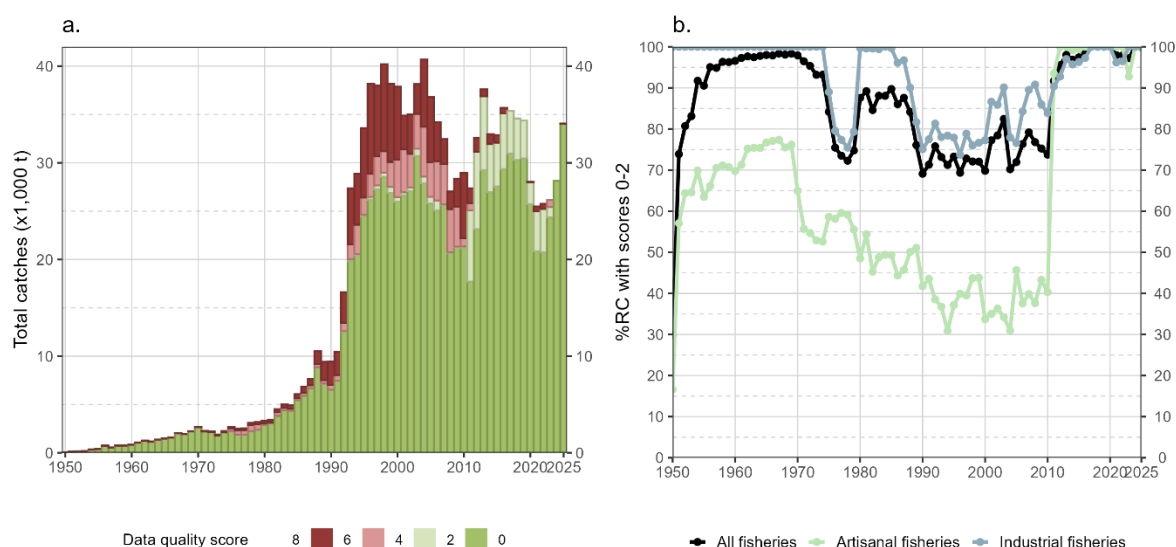


Figure 4 – (a) Annual retained catches (metric tonnes; t) of swordfish estimated by quality score whereby 0 is highest quality and 8 is poorest quality; and (b) percentage of total retained catches fully or partially reported to the IOTC Secretariat for all fisheries and by type of fishery, in the period 1950-2022 (Source – IOTC, 2025b).

2.3.2 CPUE data

As planned, there was no update to the standardised CPUE index (used within the Swordfish MP) in 2025. An updated CPUE will be required to be produced by mid-2027, in time for the next run of the Swordfish MP (late 2027), to generate a TAC for Commission consideration in 2028, and implementation in 2029-2031.

Figure 5 compares the stdCPUE time series estimates from 2023 (for period to 2022) and 2024 (for period to 2023), showing the two series to be very similar in trends and have relatively small differences, primarily in the more recent years.

Revised stdCPUE time series will be estimated for the revised IOTC Swordfish stock assessment to be reviewed by WPB24 in 2026. **The WPB should review the standardised Japanese LL CPUE for the northwest model region and identify if there are significant changes (to the previous series) that warrant further consideration for potential**

exceptional circumstances. However, it should be noted that some changes may be apparent due to changes in standardisation methodology for the assessment, that would not be apparent when applying the CPUE method approved for the Swordfish MP.

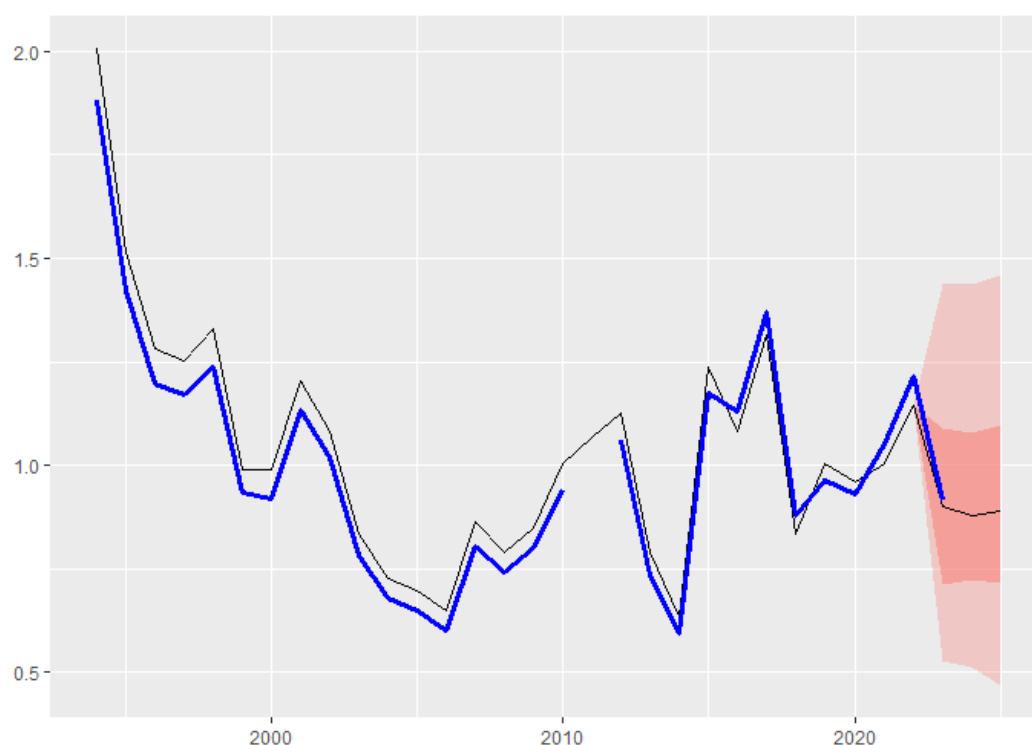


Figure 5 – Comparison of relative stdCPUE time series estimates from the 2023 standardisation process (black line, for the period to 2022) and the 2024 standardisation process (blue line, for the period to 2023) and the near future predicted CPUE (black line, 2023-2025).

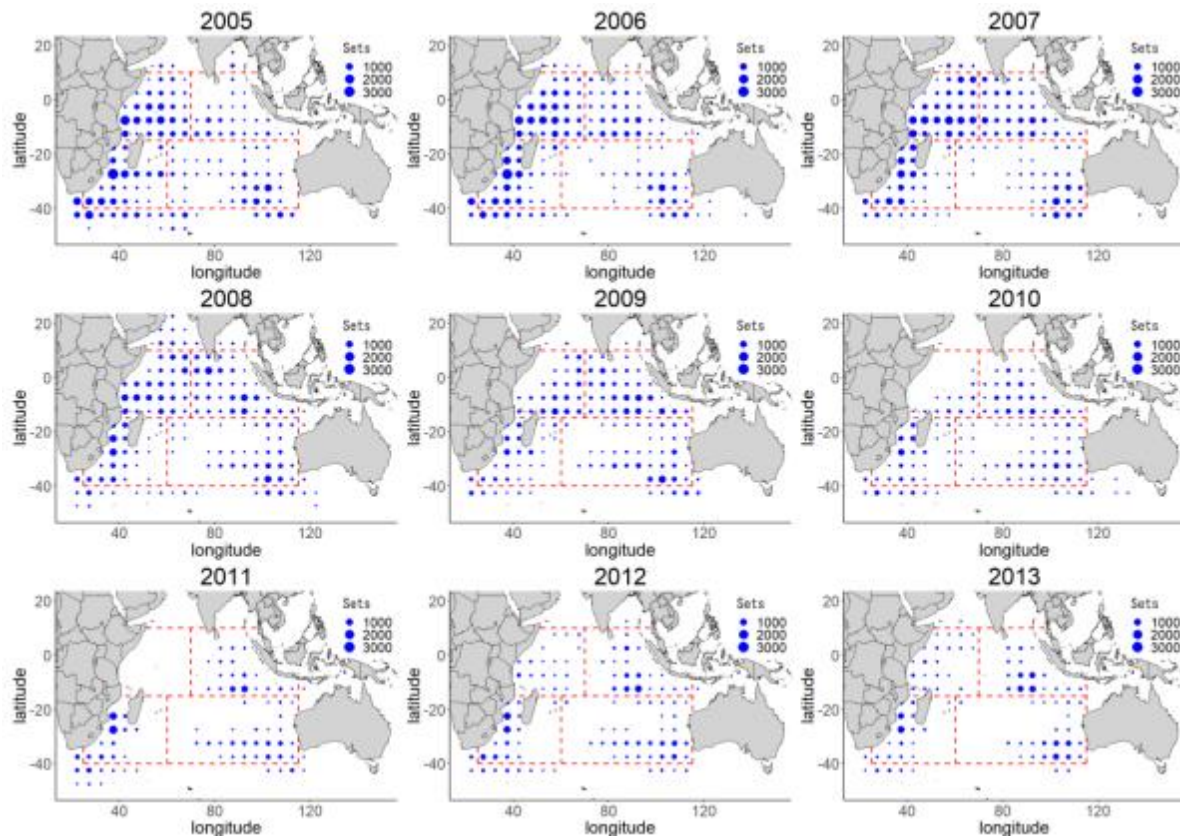
In 2024 and 2025, the WPB noted the decline in Japanese longline fishing effort and catch in the north-west Indian Ocean (an area of significant swordfish catch), and questioned if that might have potential implications for whether the Japanese CPUE can still index stock abundance in that area (IOTC, 2024e). Bromhead et. al. (2024 and 2025) noted that:

- the decline in effort in this region has been occurring since at least 2007 (Matsumoto et al 2023) (**Figure 6**),
- The MSE operating models incorporated a range of alternative CPUE series, and MP performance (using the Japan LL CPUE) was robust to these uncertainties, and was shown to reach the target.
- The NW JP LL CPUE was chosen based on prediction skill and discussions with WPB in previous years. A subsequent and more recent examination of the prediction skill of the NW JP CPUE from the 2023 assessment model indicates that the prediction skill remains acceptable (**Figure 7**).

Based on these considerations, to date, WPM has not defined this issue as an exceptional circumstance.

However, acknowledging this, and that the issue of representativeness of this CPUE series is separate to the function of the MP, the issue of declining Japanese effort should nonetheless continue to be monitored by WPB in 2026 (including via review of any new CPUE papers for the

Japanese longline fleet) and given more explicit consideration, for example, as part of the review of the MP planned for 2031, if not before. Further research on alternative sources of monitoring data or new CPUE series, for use in future MPs, could be considered and the evaluation of well-developed alternatives could also form part of the review.



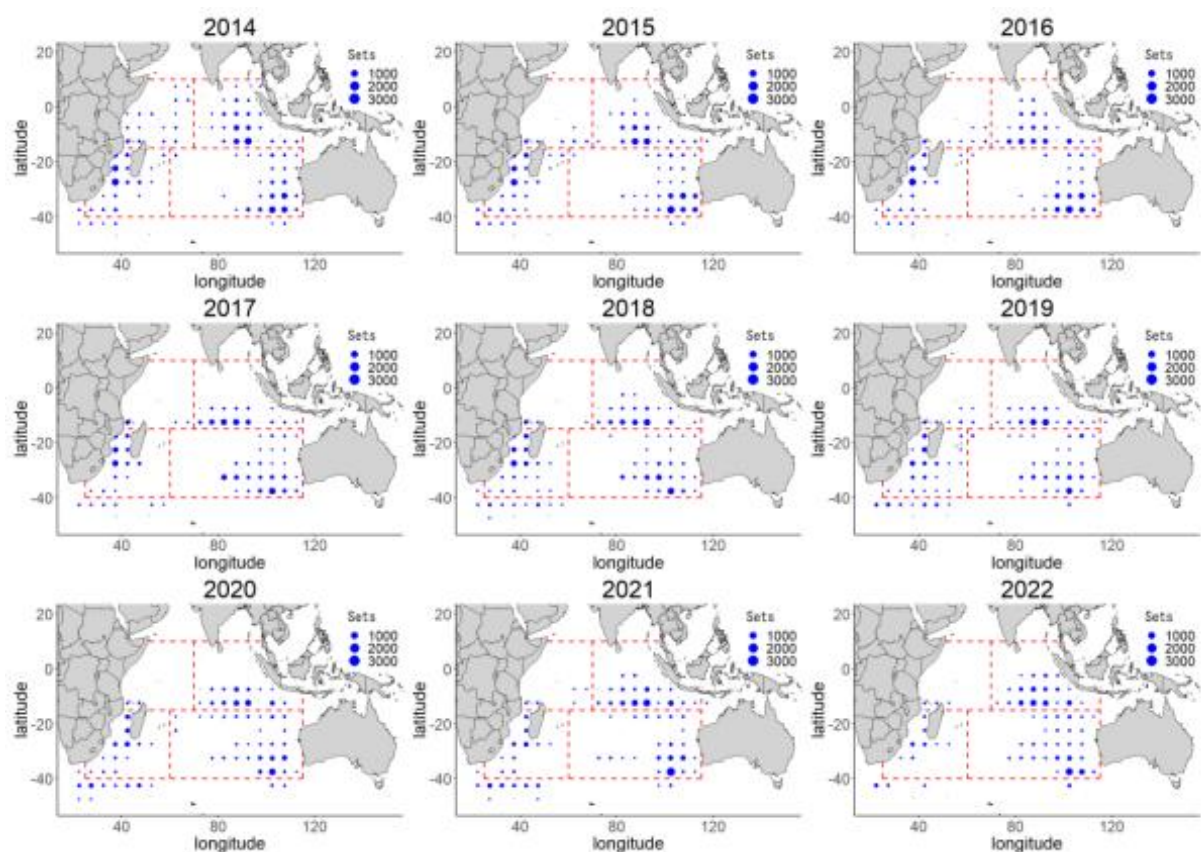


Figure 6. Distribution of fishing effort (number of sets) by Japanese longline fishery in the Indian Ocean (annual from 2005). Dashed lines show boundary for the areas for CPUE standardization (Source – Matsumoto et al 2023).

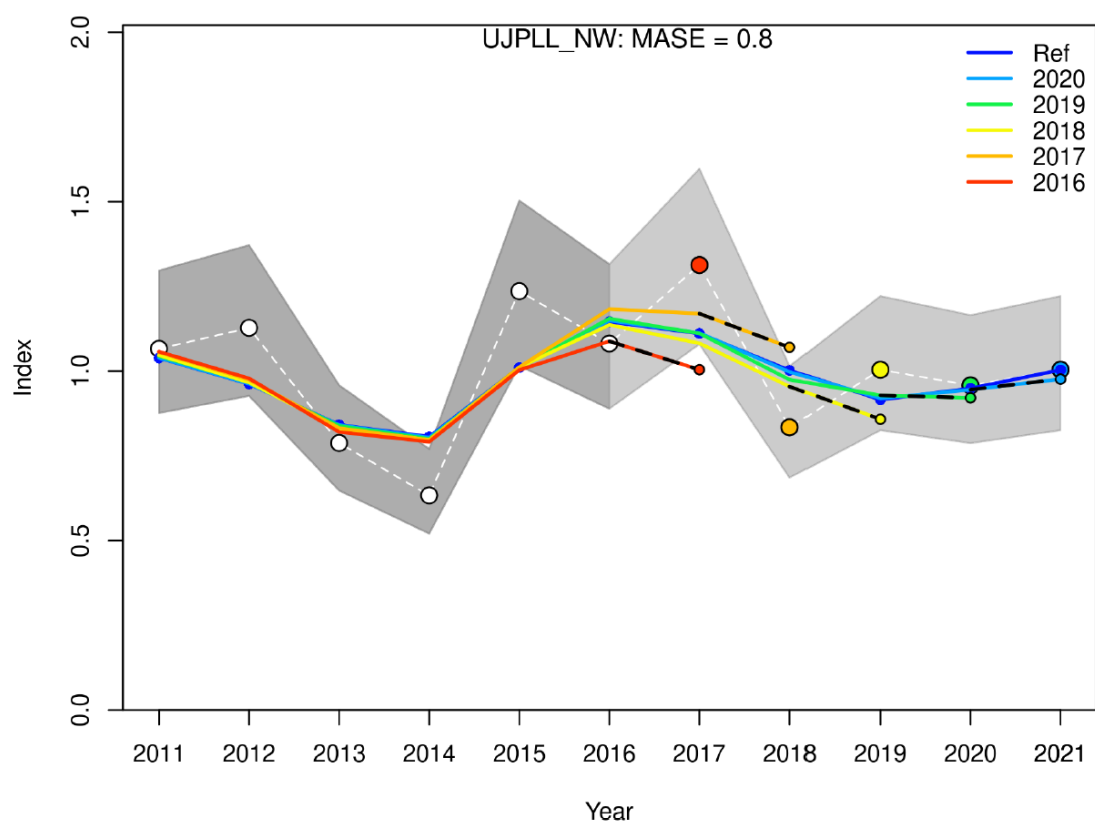


Figure 7 – Prediction skill of the base case 2023 assessment model for the north-west Indian Ocean Japanese longline CPUE. Large, coloured dots, show the CPUE observations over the last five years considered (2017-2021). Coloured lines show the one-year-ahead predictions obtained from a catch-based hindcast (as per Carvalho et al, .2021). MASE values less than 1 indicate that the model is able to generate predictions for this series that are better than random.

2.3.3 Catch relative to TAC

The MP recommended TAC in 2026 will be the first TAC to be implemented for swordfish by the IOTC, therefore there is no exceptional circumstance, because a comparison of 2026 catch relative to TAC does not exist (2026 catch will be first estimated at the end of 2027, early 2028). It is also important to note however that following the running of the MP by the SC in 2024, and the SC's advice to implement the MP derived TAC of 30527 t, the IOTC Commission in 2025 did not propose and agree a measure to implement (and allocate) the TAC recommended by the MP for 2026. As such, there is no measure in place to ensure TAC adherence in 2026. However, the 2026 Commission did agree on a measure (IOTC, 2026a) to implement the TAC in 2027 and 2028, albeit strict limits were applied only to the major catching nations, on the assumption of continued stable catches by smaller catching fleets. The Commission should monitor this going forward.

3. Discussion and Conclusion

The Exceptional Circumstances Guidelines make it clear that identifying exceptional circumstances does not necessarily result in changes to the recommended TAC. In fact, changes to the recommended TAC should be avoided except in situations where the TAC advice would pose a risk to the stock or the fishery if implemented. The alternatives are to collect more information, or conduct further research, to inform the review of evidence of exceptional circumstances in future years. Another alternative is to proceed with the TAC advice (or precautionary advice) and trigger a review of the MP earlier than planned. Recommending a change to the TAC is appropriate if there is a high risk to the stock. If the TAC is to be adjusted, further evaluation of the scale and severity of the exceptional circumstance provides guidance (% change) on how to calculate an adjustment to the TAC.

A wide range of items are reviewed to examine if there is evidence for exceptional circumstances, i.e., the data inputs to the MP, the range of uncertainties against which the MP was tested, and implementation of MP TAC advice. This review is conducted annually to provide advice to the SC on any risks with the operation of the MP and TAC advice.

The annual review of exceptional circumstances is an important component of providing management advice using an adopted management procedure. It is the safety net process that evaluates the extent to which the MP is operating as expected (from the MP testing) and identifies any risks associated with implementing the MP TAC advice. The review requires consideration of evidence for exceptional circumstances. It provides a scientific process for developing appropriate management responses if any exceptional circumstances are identified and, hence, provides transparency in TAC decision making by the Commission.

The key conclusions of the current review are:

- **TAC implementing measure** – At its meeting in May 2026, the IOTC Commission adopted Resolution 26/02 to implement the TAC recommended by the MP (IOTC, 2026a) for the years 2027 and 2028. Noting that only major catching CPCs have explicit catch limits under the Resolution, it will be important the Commission ensures total catches do not exceed the recommended level.
- **Stock status, population dynamics or biology**
 - A new swordfish stock assessment will be presented to WPB in 2026 and **WPB24 should review if: a) any biological or fishery data inputs to the assessment lie outside the bounds of those used in the OMs, and/or; b) if key population outputs lie outside the bounds of those predicted by the OMs.**
 - The WPB23 considered that new information on swordfish stock structure presented to its 23rd meeting (Sept 2023) might provide evidence of an exceptional circumstance. WPM reviewed this issue and “*NOTED that currently there is not sufficient certainty around the implications of the new research on stock structure to conclude that there is an exceptional circumstance in relation to the swordfish MP TAC advice. The WPM AGREED that additional sampling and analyses should be prioritised by the SC and Commission to help reduce uncertainty around stock structure*”.
- **Fishery or fishing operations** - Two issues were discussed at the WPB23 and WPM16 meetings in 2025 that are relevant to the consideration of potential exceptional circumstances.
 - Firstly, a new longline fishing gear (meka-rings) for targeting swordfish has emerged in the Atlantic and Pacific but its use in the IOTC, and impacts on longline catchability, is as yet uncertain. **WPB24 should consider any new information presented on this issue.**
 - Secondly, shifts have been identified in the relative proportion of swordfish catch by fishery type over time (noted by WPB22 and WPB23), but these have been incorporated into the MSE operating models (OMs), and the subsequent MP performance tested and demonstrated to be acceptable. Fishery catch levels and proportions from the 2 most recent years of data are not substantially different to the most recent levels considered by the OMs, albeit total catch levels continue to show a declining trend in recent years.
- **Catch data inputs** – In 2025 there had been no significant recent changes in the quality and representativeness of swordfish catch data to be utilised by the MP. **WPB24 should consider if this remains the case in 2026.**
- **CPUE data inputs** –
 - StdCPUE time series estimates from 2023 (for period to 2022) and 2024 (for period to 2023) are very similar. Prediction skill of the NWIO Japanese longline CPUE remains acceptable.
 - However, the issue of declining Japanese effort in the NWIO area from which the CPUE is derived should **continue to be monitored by WPB24 in 2026 (including via review of any new CPUE papers for the Japanese longline fleet)** and given more explicit consideration, for example, as part of the review of the MP planned for 2031, if not before.
- Revised stdCPUE time series are due to be estimated for the revised IOTC Swordfish stock assessment to be reviewed by WPB24 in 2026. **The WPB24 should review the standardised Japanese LL CPUE for the northwest model region and identify if there**

are significant changes (to the previous series), or further reductions in the amount of effort data underpinning that index, that warrant further considerations for potential exceptional circumstances.

Note that the annual review of exceptional circumstances for the Swordfish MP is to be updated and presented to both the WPB and WPM each year.

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